

## On the Water



**Canoeing:** Rent a canoe or bring your own, for the best way to explore is by gliding across the park's placid, shallow waters. A boat ramp and pier, near the parking area, offer access to the water. Marked canoe trails lead from the boat ramp to canoe campsites. Venture out of the millpond and take slow-moving, dark-water Bennetts Creek through Lassiter Swamp. Here, one is transported into a world of mistletoe, hanging Spanish moss and ancient cypress trees.

Canoes may be rented by the hour or for the day (later when used with canoe campsites) at the boathouse by the water's edge. Canoes, paddles, and life vests are available on a first-come basis. You must be at least 15 years of age to rent a canoe. A maximum of three people may occupy each vessel.

**Fishing:** Cast your line from the bank or journey into the millpond to fish in a pastoral setting. Small fishing craft (with trolling motors only) may be launched at the boat ramp. Largemouth bass, bluegill, chain pickerel and black crappie are just waiting to bite the hook. The Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) manages the fisheries of the millpond. All boating and fishing regulations of the WRC apply.

## History Highlights

Settlement in the Gates County area began in 1660. Residents of early rural communities made a living by farming and lumbering. In the early 1700s, Hunters Millpond was built at the head of Bennetts Creek to provide a means of processing and marketing regional produce. Highway construction destroyed this millpond in 1922, but further downstream Norfleets Millpond, built in 1811, thrived. Gristmills, a sawmill, a farm supply store, and other enterprises made the area the center of trade in Gates County. Thus, the pond became known as Merchants Millpond.

Shortly before World War II operations around the millpond came to a halt and millers sold the land to developers. In the 1960s, A.B. Coleman of Moyock purchased the property and later donated 919 acres, including the millpond, to the state. Coleman, a canoeist and lover of nature, thought the area too beautiful for development. His generous donation led to the establishment of Merchants Millpond State Park in 1973. In the same year, the Nature Conservancy contributed an additional 925 acres of woodlands to the park that now encompasses about 3,300 acres.

## Camping

A variety of settings offer camping experiences for groups large and small. Some may prefer the conveniences of drive-to sites, while those who like to rough it will relish the canoe and backpack camping areas. A modest fee is charged for all types of camping. Facilities may be limited in winter months.

**Family Camping:** The family campground is in the midst of a pine/hardwood forest just beyond the park office. Twenty campsites for tents and trailers offer picnic tables and grills. A washhouse with drinking water, restrooms, showers and laundry area serves the campground. There are no water or electrical hookups. Family campsites are available on a first-come basis.

**Backpack Camping:** Reach five campsites for backpack camping by way of a side trail off Lassiter Trail. Campers must pack all supplies, including water, to the sites. A pit toilet is nearby. These campsites are available on a first-come basis.



Views of the "enchanted forest" and Lassiter Swamp await those who travel the park on foot. Nine miles of trails offer a place to stretch out muscles left stiff by hours spent crouched in "canoe-position." At one-third of a mile, Cypress Point Trail is handicapped-accessible. It is a self-guided interpretive trail and provides beautiful views of the millpond. Much longer trails, such as Lassiter and Coleman, afford the visitor an exploration of the many habitats that surround the pond.

**Group Camping:** Organized groups will enjoy a stay in the walk-in group camping area. Facilities include a small washhouse with a pay shower. Drinking water is available nearby. Reservations are required for these sites.

**Canoe Camping:** Reach two canoe camps by way of canoe trails leading from the boat ramp. Orange markers lead the way to the family canoe camp with 10 sites. Yellow markers lead to the group canoe camp which offers three sites. Pit toilets are available, but campers must carry all supplies, including water. Family sites are available on a first-come basis, although organized groups providing their own canoes may make reservations.

**A full service, online and call center-based reservations system is being developed and will be unveiled summer 2009. Check the Web site for more details [www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov).**

## Picnicking

The shade of large trees offers a place to picnic within view of the millpond. Located north of the canoe access area, the A.B. Coleman Picnic Area has 28 tables, 1 picnic shelter and restroom facilities. Picnic sites are available on a first-come basis free of charge. The picnic shelter may be reserved for a fee.



## Hiking

Alligators. Frogs love the aquatic environment of the millpond and spring and summer rains bring a mixed chorus, including carpenter frogs, leopard frogs, cricket frogs, and species of tree frogs. Several species of pond turtles, often called cooters or sliders, bask on warm logs and stumps, while the snapping turtle makes easy prey of other aquatic creatures. Water snakes are plentiful. Most of them are harmless, but the venomous cottonmouth is also present. Treat any encounter with a snake with caution and respect.



## Flora & Fauna

**Plant Life:** The 760-acre millpond is more than 195 years old and has developed into complex, mature ecosystems.

Towering bald cypress and tupelo gum trees, displaying growths of Spanish moss and resurrection ferns, shade its dark, acidic waters. Numerous aquatic plants such as spatterdock, submerged parrot feather, duckweed, water fern, and liverworts thrive in the pond.

At the upper end of the millpond lies Lassiter Swamp, and ecological wonderland containing remnants of an ancient bald cypress swamp. Here is an eerie "enchanted forest" worthy of a fairy tale. Mistletoe has twisted and gnarled the trunks and branches of tupelo gum into fantastic shapes.

Surrounding the aquatic communities is an unspoiled wilderness. Stands of American beech highlight a mixture of pine and hardwood forests.

**Animal Life:** The diverse habitats in the park support a variety of animals. Wetland wildlife is particularly abundant. One of our more popular residents is the American Alligator. These prehistoric looking reptiles have returned to their original ranges. Please do not feed, approach or harass the



In addition to game fish, two primitive species of fish—the long-nosed gar and the bowfin—Inhabit the millpond. These interesting species have remained relatively unchanged for millions of years. Both the gar and the bowfin are large and important predators in the blackwater habitats of the coastal plain.

Over 200 species of birds, ranging from graceful egrets to turkeys and owls, have been recorded in the park. Spring and fall bring migrations of swamp warblers, most notably throngs of parulas, prothonotaries and yellow-throated warblers. In winter, a variety of waterfowl stop by on their journey south. Lucky visitors may catch a glimpse of the beautiful hooded merganser, a small fish-eating duck whose

males flaunt a magnificent black-bordered white crest. Pileated woodpeckers, barred owls, and red-shouldered hawks also enjoy the swamplands.

Paddling on the pond or creek is a great way to see several species of interesting mammals. Though beavers themselves are rarely encountered, dams, lodges, and teeth marks attest to their presence. Mink, river otter, and bobcat are occasionally spotted; and deer, raccoons, and opossums are also in residence. Bats roost in clumps of Spanish moss and are often visible at dusk as they dip to the surface of the pond to drink.

## Nature's Classroom

Merchants Millpond holds the key to many of nature's best-kept secrets. Unlock the door of nature's classroom and



watch the mysteries begin to unfold. Our rangers will guide you on exciting explorations where you'll uncover fascinating natural surroundings and make great discoveries about the world in which we live. Bring our state's rich natural and cultural heritage alive, embark on a learning adventure and discover the mysterious treasures of Merchants Millpond State Park.

Interpretive programs take place throughout the year. Contact the park office to schedule an exploration for your group or class.



## Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our regulations are posted in the park for the protection of our visitors and our park. A complete list is available at the park office. Help preserve our natural resources by observing the following:

- The removal of any plant, animal, artifact, or mineral is prohibited.
- All state parks are wildlife preserves. Hunting or trapping is unlawful.
- Fishing and boating regulations of the Wildlife Resources Commission apply in the park.
- Do not litter. Help maintain a clean environment for other visitors by placing trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans be placed in recycling containers.
- Firearms and fireworks are prohibited.
- The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.
- Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- Camping is permitted in designated areas by permit only.
- Fires are permitted only in designated areas.

## For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, remember the following safety tips.

- At Merchants Millpond there are ticks present during warm weather months. Insect repellent may help to prevent a tick bite and the possibility of disease. Tuck trousers into long socks and tuck a long-sleeved shirt into pants. Wear light colors so that ticks may be easily spotted and removed. Check often for ticks. For further information, contact park staff.
- Venomous snakes and poison ivy may be encountered along park trails. Exercise caution. Treat any encounter with a snake with caution and respect.
- Alligators are present. Please do not feed, approach or harass them.
- Take a vested interest in your safety, wear a life vest when canoeing. Do not canoe alone. Only those familiar with the area should canoe in remote locations.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or explanation of park rules.

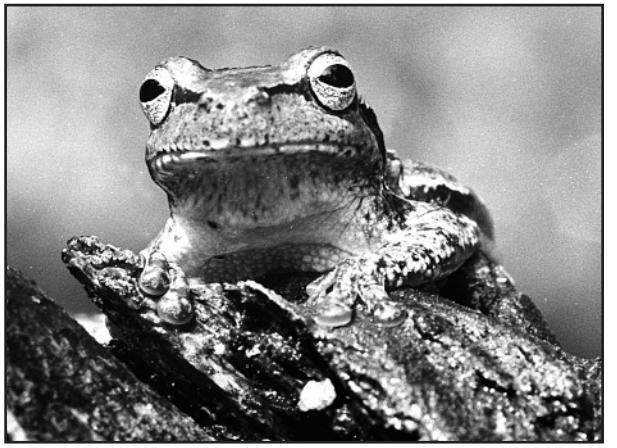
The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation is a division of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

William G. Ross Jr.  
Secretary  
  
Beverly E. Perdue  
Governor

5,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$1,180.61 or .23 cents per copy.

# Welcome!

An "enchanted forest." Primitive species of fish relatively unchanged over millions of years. Towering baldcypress trees with massive trunks and luxuriant growths of Spanish moss. This is Merchants Millpond State Park.



Here, coastal pond and southern swamp forest mingle, creating one of North Carolina's rarest ecological communities. Together with upland forests, these environments create a haven for wildlife and humanity alike. Escape the hectic pace of life and find sanctuary in a canoe. Drift idly along the smooth, dark surface of the millpond and savor the many sights and sounds that come alive in the stillness of the forest. Journey into remote and undisturbed Lassiter Swamp, a place that embodies the spirit of adventure. It would take weeks in the Okefenokee to see what you can see in Merchants Millpond in a few hours.

If canoeing is not for you, fish for game species. Choose from an assortment of camping opportunities or enjoy a picnic beside the millpond. The remarkable surroundings of Merchants Millpond State Park lend themselves to a variety of relaxing activities.

## Information

Discover more about Merchants Millpond State Park, contact:

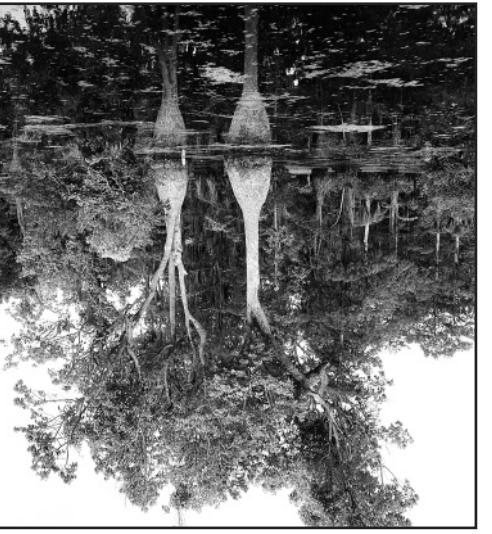
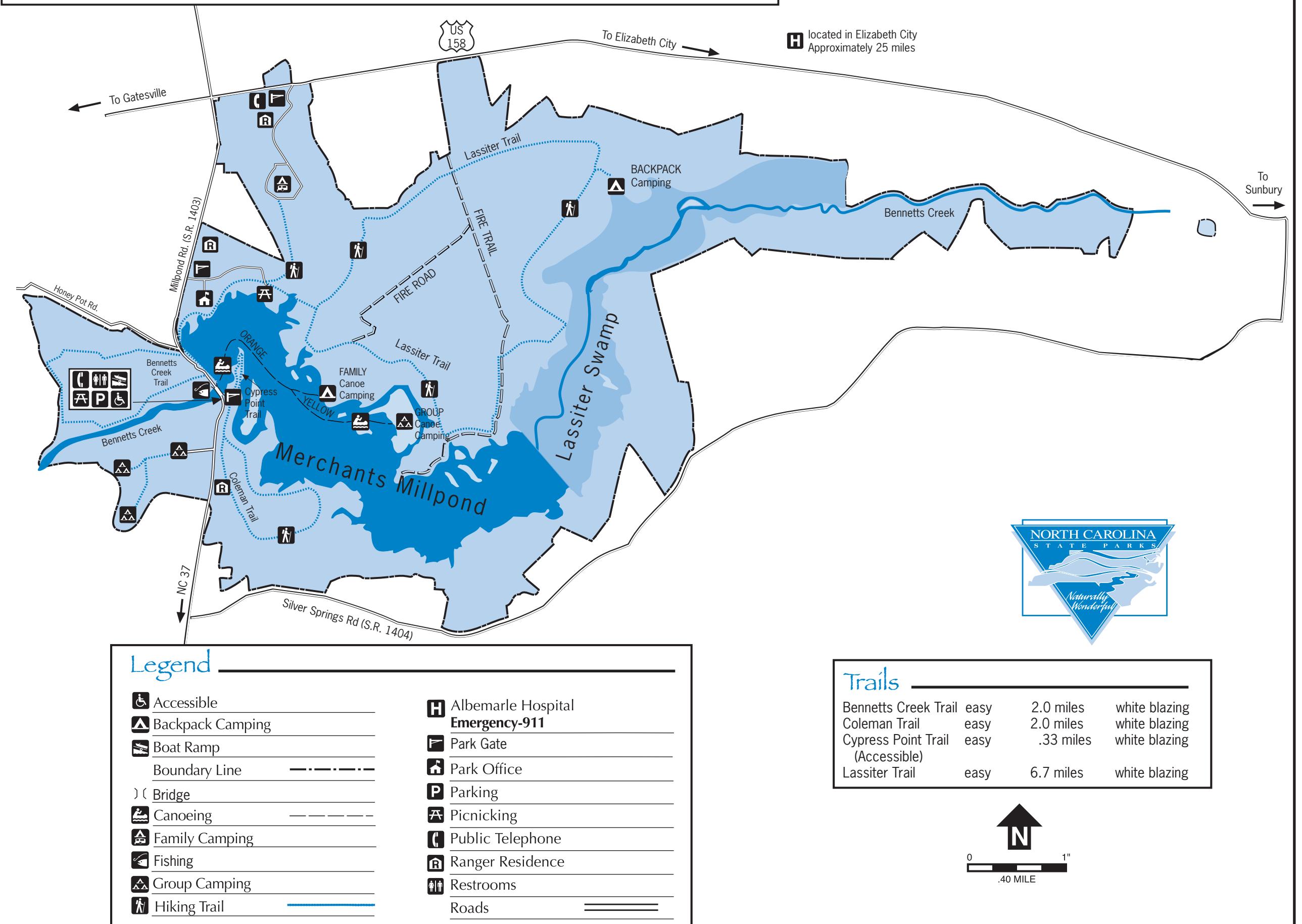
Merchants Millpond State Park  
176 Millpond Road  
Gatesville, NC 27938  
(252) 357-1191  
[merchants.millpond@ncmail.net](mailto:merchants.millpond@ncmail.net)  
[www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov)

Discover other North Carolina state parks and recreation areas, contact:

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources  
Mail Service Center 1615  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615  
(919) 733-4181

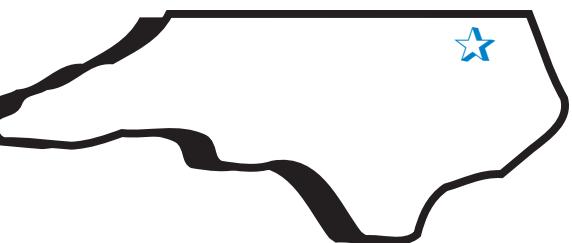
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# Merchants Millpond State Park



State Park  
Millpond  
Merchants

Merchants  
Millpond  
State Park



Merchants Millpond is located in Gates County near the community of Gatesville. The park may be reached from U.S. 158, N.C. 32 and N.C. 37. It is approximately 30 miles from the cities of Ahoskie, Elizabeth City and Edenton, North Carolina and Suffolk, Virginia.

## Park Hours

November–February  
March - May, September, October  
June – August  
Closed Christmas Day

8 a.m.–6 p.m.  
8 a.m.–8 p.m.  
8 a.m.–9 p.m.